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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

TO : Dr. Joseph M. Babbitt, Assistant Director, National Institute of Mental Health, NIH

PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

DATE: November 1, 1960

FROM : Chief, International Organization Relations Branch, INR, OSC

SUBJECT : Sample of Piper Methysticum

The enclosed sample of the rhizome of piper methysticum is sent to you per our telephone conversation yesterday. I understand from people who have been exposed to the decoction that it has a profound effect. In small quantities (one-half a coconut shell of the liquid) it causes complete paralysis for 3 to 4 hours, with loss of consciousness for about half that time. The local practitioners frequently use it as an anesthetic when drawing teeth.

The traditional method of preparation of the k'ava is to chew the root until it is impregnated with saliva, pound it in a wooden bowl, cover it with water, let it stand for 4 hours, then strain.

I have not tried this variety; however, the taste of the liquid made from the dried root in Fiji is reminiscent of the smell of dishwater and looks as though someone had washed dirty ice cream plates in it.

Arthur S. Osborne
Medical Director

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